

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE GEMORA

Rav Ashi<sup>1</sup> devoted himself to composing the *Gemora*, and decided to do with the words of all those who came after Rabbaynu Hakadosh,<sup>2</sup> what Rabbaynu Hakadosh did with the words of all those who came after Moses: He collected all the words of those spokesmen, the deliberations of the thinkers, the explanations of the commentators and the legal intricacies. He gathered and mastered it all with the wisdom granted him by The-Holy-One-Blessed-be-He of a humble soul, and glory of wisdom, and he composed the *Gemora*. He intended to accomplish four goals:

(1) *To explain statements by the Mishna* by (a) recording the divergent *opinions* as to its intent, (b) recording the *arguments* of each interpreter against his colleague, and (c) recording the disclosure of the *correct opinion*. This was his foremost goal.

(2) *To record the final decisions*, following the opinion of one of the two opponents in disagreement concerning the precise version of the Mishna, on its interpretation, or on the new laws instituted [by the Tannaim] and included in the Mishna.

(3) *To record the new applications* which the Sages of each generation derived from the Mishna, disclosing the basic, underlying principles which the Tannaim<sup>3</sup> of the Mishna based themselves upon, arranging them in the form that we have now; and also *to record the additional Gezayros and Takonnos* enacted ever since Rabbaynu Hakadosh, up to the time of the author of the work (Rav Ashi).

(4) *To record the Aggadic Drashos* appropriate for the topic of each chapter within which they are now found.



### *The Aggadic Drashos*

Now, the value and benefit of this fourth matter, the *Aggadic Drash* found in the Talmud, is not to be thought of as small; on the contrary, the *Aggadic Drash* possesses great profundity, as it comprises wondrous allusions and precious treasures. When an intelligent scrutiny is made of the *Drashos*, what will be perceived is a measure of the Essence of Truth, of which there is naught of higher degree. Through these *Drashos* will be uncovered particles of the Divine Concepts, and the fundamental realities which men of wisdom kept hidden and which they did not want to reveal, and everything which the philosophers of their generations established.

Yet, if you will inspect the Aggadic Drashos and construe them following their immediately apparent meanings, you will see ideas expressed which are the height of absurdity.<sup>4</sup> The Sages purposely arranged them in such a disguised form due to extremely weighty considerations. First of all, the purpose in this was to sharpen their disciples' wits and to broaden their minds. Another purpose was to beguile the fools, so that their minds would not discern their actual substance; for if you would plainly show them these brilliant truths, they would turn their faces away in scorn, because of their destitute nature. "*Do not reveal The Secret to them*" (Kiddushin, 71A), since their intellect is not developed and perfected to the point of understanding the Truths properly. Similarly, the Sages would never want to publicly discuss these Truths even among themselves. They have already noted (Haggiga, 13A) that one of the Sages had associated with some men well-versed in the science of *Ma'aseh B'ray'shis* [*The Account of Creation*]*—the Sage himself being an expert in the deeper science of Ma'aseh Merkava* [*The Meaning behind the Description of the Heavenly Chariot of Issiah's Prophecy*]*—and he told them, "Teach me Ma'aseh B'ray'shis, and I will instruct you in Ma'aseh Merkava," and they agreed. However, after they taught him Ma'aseh B'ray'shis, he refrained from teaching them Ma'aseh Merkava. Now, G-d forbid that he did this out of heartlessness, to withhold wisdom, or because he desired to be their superior in knowledge—for such traits are despicable to any fool, not to mention any-*



one among these noble princes! He did this because he considered himself fit to comprehend what they possessed, but he considered them unequipped to grasp what he had mastered. He corroborated his decision by the words of Solomon, "*Honey and milk—under your tongue!*" (Song of Songs, 4:11), meaning, those sweet Sciences, for which the soul craves as the palate craves for honey and milk, must be hidden and not spoken of, and must not even border upon discussion in any way. "*—under your tongue!*"—These subjects do not contain that which is fitting to be publicly taught and demonstrated even in the Yeshiva Academies of wisdom. Indeed, they are hinted at in the Scriptures only through well-cloaked allusions; and when The-Holy-One-Blessed-be-He will remove the veil of ignorance from the mind of him whom He pleases to—after that person had exerted and ingrained himself with the Wisdoms—then that person will partially comprehend their meaning, commensurate with his intellect. Accompanied by his wisdom, research and earnest intellectual toil, man has nothing else left to do but to leave the matter in the hands of the Creator, to supplicate and pray to Him to enlighten him and to reveal the Secrets to him which are hidden in the Scriptures, as David, *o'sh*, did: "*Unveil my eyes, and I will examine the wonders of Thy Torah!*" (Psalms, 119:18). And when The-Holy-One-Blessed-be-He does unveil a man's eyes, and shows him whatever He shows him, that man must, in turn, conceal the information from others, as we have explained. If he should allude to any of it but a trifle, he should do so only with one who has a fully developed and perfected intellect and who is known to be a man of integrity, as is illustrated through many accounts recorded in the Talmud. It is thus improper for a scholarly person to reveal what he knows of the Secrets, unless it is to one who is greater than, or at least equal to, him. For, if he reveals it to an unknowledgeable person, even if this person will not discredit it, he will still not appreciate it properly. For this reason, Solomon the Wise stated, "*Do not speak to the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words*" (Proverbs, 23:9).



A third reason the Sages composed their Drashos in the form they did, is that the instruction of the nation's masses must be through such allusions and parables, so that the women, youth and children will also benefit from it, until it will eventually develop and perfect their intellects; and then they will comprehend and be enlightened to the actual meanings behind those allusions. Solomon referred to this idea, too, when he stated (at the very beginning of his Book of Parables), "O, To understand (the meaning of) a parable and an allegorical reference, the speech of sages and their allusions!" (Ibid., 1:6).

For these three reasons, the Sages presented their Drashos in a style by which the mind of a fool will reject them out of hand because of his way of thinking. It is improper to assign the deficiency to the Drash; one may rather suspect that the deficiency is a result of his own intellectual shortcomings.<sup>6</sup> Thus, when one finds any one of their parables very difficult to understand according to its simple meaning, he ought to be very amazed over a mind such as his which cannot comprehend the actually intended concept to such a degree that the realities are so infinitely distant from him! For, it is a fact that intellects have advantages of one over another, determined by the advantages of their compositions. Just as we find the physical make-up of one man superior to that of another, so, too, one man's intellect may be superior to that of another. The intellect of one who understands a complex matter is unquestionably different than that of one who cannot. The former is called *Activated Intellect*; the latter, *Dormant Intellect*. It is for this reason that there are some things which seem to be the epitome of truth and clarity in the eyes of men, while someone else considers them to be far-fetched and even impossible, all according to the level of wisdom possessed by each.

The following is a clear illustration of this fact: Imagine a man who is a scholar in medicine, arithmetic and music, who is fluent in physics, quick-witted and is of good nature, but who is nevertheless intellectually void as far as geometric and astronomical sciences are concerned. Suppose we would inform him of, and ask his opinion



of, a man who claims that the form of the sun, which we see as a small disk, is really a sphere, and that the size of that sphere is  $166 \frac{3}{8}$  times the size of the earth; that the earth's sphere by which we are measuring is a globe with a perimeter of 24,000 miles [according to Ptolemy]; and through this method the number of miles in the sun's perimeter can be determined. There is no doubt that our quick-witted man, who is so enlightened by the sciences we mentioned, will be incapable of tolerating such a belief. All this, in his eyes, is farfetched and incomprehensible. Immediately his mind will tell him that even a claim to any knowledge of such a thing is absurd. How could it be possible, he will challenge, for a mortal who occupies but one span of the earth's surface, to know the dimensions of the solar sphere, its perimeter and area, to the extent that his mind could comprehend it as it comprehends the proportions of a piece of land? He will demand, "How is such a thing possible? The solar sphere is in heaven at the furthest distance; it is impossible for us to even suitably discern the sun's composition—we can only perceive its glow; how then can a mortal reach on high to measure it and be precise to three-eighths of exactitude?—This is unheard of nonsense!" There will be no doubt in his mind as to the absurdity and impossibility of such a claim.

Yet, if he would acquaint himself with the study of geometry texts and understand the mathematical computations of relations which are determined by the known properties of spherical and other types of forms, and then proceed to study the texts written for this purpose, i.e., the famous *Almagesti*, on the calculations of the heavenly spheres, then the meaning of the claim would become clear to him, and he will now consider it unquestionably true and proven. He will perceive no difference between the factuality of the sun's dimensions being as we had told him and the factuality of the sun's very existence. His mind will become most accustomed to accepting that which he had originally considered to be the most far-fetched nonsense, and he will have perfect belief in it. This is entirely possible; and we are not establishing our example of the man we are examining as one who is ignorant of other sciences, but as one who



is quite intelligent, fit and knowledgeable. Nevertheless, the question we had asked him was one concerning the branch of knowledge called *Mathematics*,<sup>7</sup> a branch of knowledge almost as advanced as *Metaphysics*. How much more would our point be true with one who has no wisdom at all, and did not accustom himself to any approach to *Mathematics* whatsoever, but merely traversed from the undeveloped intelligence of his mother to the undeveloped intelligence of his wife!<sup>8</sup> When such a person will be asked pertaining to the divine studies which are hidden beneath the surface of the *Drashos*, they will undoubtedly seem as far-fetched in his eyes as the heavens are far from the earth, and his mind will be powerless to understand a word of them.

Therefore, it is proper for us to give those *Drashos* the benefit of the doubt, and it would benefit us to carefully analyze them in depth, and not be so hasty as to even brush aside one word of them. When any of their words seem far-fetched to us, we must immerse ourselves in the various branches of knowledge until we understand the concepts in the matter at hand, if our hearts are capable of grasping them. For even the Sages, though they were of excellent minds, though they yearned to study, worked hard at their researches, were in the company of profound scholars, and though they kept away from all worldly matters, they would still assign a deficiency to themselves when comparing themselves to those Sages who preceded them: "*The greatness of the ancients is as great as the doorway of a vestibule, and that of the moderns is not even as big as the eye of a needle*" (Eruvin, 53A). This, then, certainly applies to us, from whom wisdom had ceased and disappeared when The-Holy-One-Blessed-be-He informed us that "*the wisdom of wise men shall perish and the understanding of men of understanding shall be obliterated*" (Issiah, 29:14); we, each one of us whom Scriptures characterized as possessing four adverse qualities: (1) weakened intellect and (2) strengthened superficial desires, (3) laziness in the search for wisdom and (4) zealotry for superficial gratifications—the "four deformities"—how can we *not* assign the deficiency to ourselves, when we compare ourselves to our predecessors?!



And because the later sages realized this fact (may they rest in peace), that all of their predecessors' words were clear and pure, with nothing superfluous stated, they commanded and exhorted us that no man may ridicule them: "*Anyone who ridicules the words of the Sages is sentenced to boiling excrement [in the Hereafter]*" (Gittin, 57A). And you have no greater boiling excrement than the stupidity which made him degenerate into ridiculing the words of the Sages! Thus, you will never find anyone who brushes aside their words, except for a man who seeks superficial gratifications and overindulges in physical pleasures, one who did not enlighten his heart with any of the shining brilliance of Torah.

And because they saw the truth of their words, they devoted their entire lives to that task of mastering the Torah, and commanded us to be diligent in studying it at night and for part of the day, and they deemed this task the height of wisdom, as it indeed is.

### *Analysis of a Drash*

They said: "The-Holy-One-Blessed-be-He has nothing in His world<sup>9</sup> [of interest to Him] but the *four cubits of Jewish Law*, alone" (Brachos, 8A). Now, concentrate well upon this statement; for if you construe it according to its immediately apparent meaning, you will find it to be very far from the truth.—As if the four cubit area<sup>10</sup> of Jewish Law, in of itself, is G-d's be-all and end-all, and as if all other sciences and branches of knowledge He pushes aside! And at the time of Shem and Ayver,<sup>11</sup> and afterwards, when there was as of yet no Jewish Law,<sup>12</sup> can we say that The-Holy-One-Blessed-be-He had no interest in the world whatsoever?!

However, if you will analyze this statement deeply, you will see contained in it, of the sciences, an astounding concept, and you will find it to be a broad, all-encompassing thought. Now, I will elucidate upon it for you, so that it may be used as a model for any other such Drashos you may come across. Therefore, apply your heart to this properly:



### 1. *the purpose of all entities*

Know, that the ancient philosophers investigated carefully—with the wisdom and thinking ability given to them—until they came to the conclusion that every existing thing necessarily possesses a purpose<sup>13</sup> for which it exists; things do not exist without a purpose.<sup>14</sup> When they established this overall rule, they began to categorize all existing objects in order to understand the purpose of each and every one. They found that the purpose of every existing object which is manufactured—i.e., made by means of a human skill—is known, and requires no investigation to understand; for an artisan will not proceed to make an article if its purpose is not first pictured in his mind's imagination. For instance, the carpenter would not have constructed a saw unless he had first wondered how he could cut solid wood, imagined the form of a saw, and had then begun to construct it in order to cut with it. Thus, it is known that the purpose of the saw is to be drawn across the wood, the purpose of the ax is to chop, the purpose of the needle is to sew material, and likewise with all existing objects made by means of a human skill.

However, as for those things which were created by Divine work, the wisdom of nature, such as the various species of trees and grasses, the various minerals of the earth, different kinds of stones and species of animals—the purposes of some of these are hidden and completely unknown (unless it can become known through prophecy or by seeing into the future; but through scientific investigation it is impossible), since it is beyond the ability of man to investigate so deeply that he will understand for which reason some of the insects are made with wings and some without; or, for which reason some worms have many legs and some have but few; or what the precise purpose of this specific worm or that particular ant is.

However, through their knowledge of the purpose of those objects and beings which are larger, and whose actions are more apparent, the greatness of men of wisdom is indeed revealed. The wiser one is, the greater the desire to learn and the clearer the ideal, the more complete and perfect will be his knowledge. Accordingly, when



The-Holy-One-Blessed-be-He granted Solomon the wisdom promised him, Solomon thereupon knew whatever is possible for man to know—in the capacity of being a mortal—of the secrets of the creation of these species. He spoke on the purpose of the creation of the trees, the grasses, and animal species: “*And he spoke about the trees—from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the moss that goes out in the wall—and he spoke about the beast [zoology], about the bird [ornithology], about the reptile and about the fishes*” (Kings I, 5:13), and this was testimony that he had the Divine Spirit within him. “*And they came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon*” (Ibid., 14).

## 2. Man is the purpose

Nevertheless, it should be understood that ultimately, all existing things in the sublunar world<sup>15</sup> were created for the sake of man, alone:<sup>16</sup> Of the *living* species, some are meant for his consumption, such as the sheep and cattle, etc., and some are meant to aid him in ways other than nourishment, such as the donkey is—namely, to carry what man is unable to transport manually; horses are meant for man to be able to reach far distances in short time. Some of them are species whose benefits are not known, but nevertheless they are beneficial to man, though in a way which is not as of yet recognized.

Likewise, this applies to the trees and vegetation: Some are meant for consumption and some are meant to be medicines; this applies as well to the grasses and other species of growth.

Now, any of the animals or herbs you find which have no benefit, and contain no nutritional value—as far as you can ascertain—know, that that conclusion is arrived at only due to the weakness of our intellect. It is impossible for any grass, any produce, or any living animal—from the elephant to the worm—not to have a benefit for man. And the proof for this is the fact that in each and every generation new herbs and species of produce are discovered which had been unknown to our predecessors, and which are seen to have great benefits.—And though it is not within the



ability of man's mind to encompass the benefits of all the earth's forms of vegetation, perhaps their properties will be revealed by way of experiment in the future generations.

If you ask, "Why then were the poisons created, such as the herb called '*Bish*' or '*Blood Herb*,' through which man dies, and which have no benefit?"—you ought to know that they *do* indeed have benefits. For if one dies by eating them, one will not die by spreading them externally on his body's surface. When you realize that man derives great benefits from the venoms of serpents and the viper in such a manner, it is needless to say that those things which are less harmful must also have great benefits.

### 3. *the purpose of Man is to think*

Now, since it was found that the purpose of all these objects is for the existence of man, it is necessary for us to also investigate and determine . . . for what purpose was *Man* created? What was the purpose of his being formed? When they deliberated in the investigation of this matter, the philosophers found that man has very many mechanisms, as opposed to all species of animals and trees, which have only one or two mechanisms, each. Witness the palm trees, which have no mechanism but that of producing dates. Likewise, all other trees. Similarly, with animals: One will weave, alone, such as the spider; another will build, such as the swallow;<sup>17</sup> and another will mangle, such as the lion. But *Man* performs *many* various actions. They investigated each of his mechanisms, one by one, to derive the purpose of his creation, and they found that his main purpose is to perform one function, alone; and that it was because of that one function that Man was created, the rest of his mechanisms acting solely to keep him alive *in order to fulfill that prime function*. This function is: *to form accurate abstract concepts in his mind, to know realities as they are*. For, intelligence decrees that it is a lie and a waste to claim that the mission of Man is merely to eat, drink and copulate; or to build a fortress—because all of these activities are external, inessential, transient pastimes; they



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do not add to his inner self; his essence; furthermore, *he shares these activities* with all the other creatures. But *wisdom* is that force which adds onto his inner abilities, that which elevates him from a contemptible level to one of nobility and honor; for without wisdom he is only *potentially* a Man, and with it he becomes a *Man* in actuality. A man, before he activates his dormant understanding and knowledge, is no more than a beast. He is indistinguishable from the other species of living beings except for his power of logical reasoning, i.e., in that he forms thoughts in his mind, the most profound of thoughts being the picturing in his mind the One-ness of The-Holy-One-Blessed-be-He and all G-d-related ideas which accompany this concept.<sup>18</sup> For *all other branches of knowledge are merely means by which to train one's mind* until it gains the Divine Knowledge. An exhaustive discussion of this topic, however, would be very lengthy.<sup>19</sup>

### 4. *Mitzvos prerequisite for Wisdom*

However, hand in hand with the picturing of these concepts, one must avoid the many bodily, superficial pleasures.<sup>20</sup> It is elementary that the deterioration of the spiritual faculty attends the pampering of the body's superficial pleasures and that refining the spiritual faculty demands the taxing of the body. For when man pursues allurements, strengthens the sensual over the conceptual, enslaves his intellect under his desires, to the extent that he reverts to the level of a beast which pictures no thought in its mind but eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse—in him the Divine potential, viz., the intellect, will not be realized, and he will then regress to the level of an uncouth creature, stalking through a Sea of Emptiness.

It is clear from these postulates that *the purpose of the world and all that is in it is: The profoundly wise and good man*; that the activation of *Wisdom and Deed* [Mitzvos] becomes clear to an individual—a member of the class of Mankind. And by *Wisdom*



and Deed, I mean (a) the picturing in one's mind of realities *as they are*, grasping whatever is possible for man to grasp; and (b) the refining and directing of one's natural, inborn qualities, properly, not being carried away with superficial gratifications, accepting only those pleasures which will benefit his physical health and best develop all his temperaments. Therefore, the man who embodies this concept is himself *the Purpose; he is The Ultimately Desired Object*. This is not only known by the prophets, but even the scholars of the transitory nations; those who have never seen the prophets nor heard their wisdom, have also realized that a man is not perfect until he embodies: *Profound Wisdom and Deed*. Let the words of the famous philosopher<sup>21</sup> suffice: "*The Alm-ghty's desire for us is that we be: Understanding-Righteous ones.*" For, if a man is ostensibly wise and understanding, but quests for his superficial desires, he is not truly wise. For it is an axiomatic principle of knowledge that a man should not indulge in bodily, superficial luxuries; he must do only that which is necessary for forming a sound body [and mind]. When we explain Mesechta Ahvos, we will give this subject the full treatment it deserves.<sup>22</sup>

In this vein, we find that the prophet criticizes and considers sinful whoever boasts that he is wise, yet rebels against the mitzvos, questing for his shallow desires:

How can you say, "We are wise, and Hashem's Torah is with us . . ."?—Behold, the word of Hashem they despise; what wisdom can they possess?! (Jeremiah, 8:8-9)

And conversely, if a man is a servant of G-d, abstaining from superficial pleasures, staying away from dainties—except for that which is required for sound health—and conducts himself in all the other ways conducive to the best possible physical condition as well, and strengthens himself in all the pleasant characteristics and traits . . . but does not possess profound wisdom, he also is still lacking perfection, though he is more perfect than the first type of person discussed; only, the deeds he performs are heading astray,



they are not progressing along the way of truth. Pertaining to this, the Sages (may they rest in peace) declared, "*A boor cannot be a sin-fearing man, nor can an unscholarly person be pious,*" as we have just explained. And, whoever suggests that any unscholarly man is a pious person, is rejecting the Sages, who made an ineffaceable decree concerning this, and he is rejecting the intellect as well. Because of this concept, you find the command worded throughout the Torah, "And you should *learn*" the *mitzvos* [commands] of the Torah, and only afterwards does it state, "to *perform* them" [cf., Deuteronomy, 5:1]. It introduces the command to gain *knowledge* before the *deed*; for, through learning, a man will accurately reach the deed; whereas the deed will not bring him on to the knowledge.<sup>23</sup> This is the thought of what they said, peace be upon them: "*Learning brings one on to doing*" (Kedushin, 40B).

There now remains one parenthetical problem: One might ask, "You have just stated that, (a) the Divine Wisdom *does not create anything in vain*, but for a purpose; and that, (b) of all the creatures in the world, *the most glorious is Man*; and that, (c) the purpose of one's being a man is for him to *form profound intellectual concepts* in his mind. Now, if that is the case, why did The-Holy-One-Blessed-be-He produce all those men who do *not* have the capability to form profound intellectual concepts in their minds? We see that most mortals are devoid of real intelligence and are empty of profound wisdom, seeking their superficial desires, and that the person who is totally wise, who rejects the mundane, is an individual among the masses—only one in a number of generations can be found!"<sup>24</sup>

The answer to this question is that those people were created for two other reasons:

(1) *To accommodate that one individual*<sup>25</sup>—for if all human beings would be seekers of profound wisdom and philosophy, the process of the world's upkeep would be destroyed, and the species of human beings would become extinct in a matter of days. For the individual man is extremely deficient, requiring many services. He



would have to learn how to plow and reap, to thresh, grind, and bake, and to make the tools required for these skills with which he could perfect the production of his sustenance. Likewise, he would also have to learn how to spin and weave, in order to produce clothing; how to build, to erect a place for shelter; and to make the equipment necessary for all these undertakings. But in the life-span of *Methuselah*, there is not enough time to learn all these skills which are all critically vital to man's existence. — When, therefore, would he find the opportunity to study and acquire profound wisdom? Hence, the rest of mankind was created to provide these functions required for the upkeep of the world machinery, so that the scholar will have his needs prepared before him, there will be a social order, and wisdom will be in existence. How well-put is the saying, "*If not for the 'imbeciles,' the world would be left to lay in ruin!*" For, there is no idiocy in the world comparable to the idiocy of the common man: He is frail and of wretched make-up, yet he travels from the beginning of the Second of the *World's Seven Regions* to the end of the Sixth;<sup>26</sup> he crosses through oceans in the winter, and treks through lands of drought in the heat-filled summer, mortally endangering himself with wild beasts and serpents, in order to gain a few coins. When he gathers a fraction of the coins for which he sold his entire being, he begins to distribute them among craftsmen to build him a foundation upon the earth's globe out of cement and stones, in order to establish a fortress upon it that will stand many years—though he knows full-well he hasn't the years in his life left to outlive an edifice of reeds! Is there a stupidity and idiocy greater than this?! All the pleasures of the world are likewise absolute insanity and folly; nevertheless, they are responsible for the world's survival.—It is for this reason that the Sages (peace be upon them) designated one who possesses no profound wisdom, an "*Am-Ha'aretz*," ("*Person of the World*"); i.e., one created purely to supervise the maintenance of the world, and whose description they therefore associated with the land.

One might object, "Nevertheless, we see cases of an imbecile and fool who is idle in his relationship with the world, not toiling



in it, while others must serve him and be occupied with his concerns; it is even possible that it is the wise and understanding man who is toiling in his affairs!"—However, it is not as it appears. For the relaxation of that imbecile is likewise serving, and preparing his product for the benefit of, the man to whom the Creator desires to give it: Though he sits back with his bundle of money or possessions, the fool will still order his servants to build a perfect, beautiful palace, and to plant an impressive vineyard, as the kings and those like them do. And it is very possible that the palace is actually unwittingly being all arranged and prepared for a pious person who, in the distant future, will one day come and seek refuge from the sun's heat by one of the palace's many walls, which will be responsible for saving him from death. (*"He may produce [a garment], but a righteous person will wear it"* [Job, 27:17]); or, one day a cup of wine will be bought from that vineyard, from which will be made the medicine called *Tar'yaka*, which will save the life of a pious and perfect man bitten by a serpent. Such is the way of the Holy-One-Blessed-be-He, and such is His wisdom, through which all "nature" was made, *"Ideas from long ago [fulfilled with] strong reliability"* (Issiah, 25:1).

This concept was explained by the Sages: *"When Ben-Zoma would stand on the Temple Mount and see Israel ascending to celebrate,<sup>27</sup> he would say, 'Blessed be He, Who created all these to relieve me!'"*<sup>28</sup> — for he was, peace be upon him, unique in his generation.

(2) The second reason for the existence of those who have no profound wisdom is a corollary of the fact that the men of wisdom are extremely few, a situation which is vital according to Divine Wisdom. (And one should not say to the fact that the Prime Wisdom necessitates this, "Why should it be so?" just as one does not ask, "Why are there nine celestial spheres; why are the planets seven, and the basics, four?"<sup>29</sup> For all these and similar matters are deemed necessarily so through the Creation.)<sup>30</sup> The Sages have already explicated the fact of this situation (Succah 45B). And Rabbi Shimmon ben-Yohai said of his contemporaries—even though



they were giants in wisdom—

I have seen those who have risen in greatness, and they are but few; . . . and if they are two, they are myself and my son. (Ibid.)<sup>31</sup>

This being the situation, the masses were therefore created to be associates for the scholars, *so that they will not be left lonely*.<sup>32</sup>

Now, you might think that this latter benefit is an insignificant one. However, it is essential and even more important than the first. For the Holy-One-Blessed-be-He Himself *established the evil peoples* in the land of Israel so as to give the Israelites associates and *to keep the pious ones from being lonely*: “*I will not banish them in one year, lest the land be left desolate . . .*” (Exodus, 23:29).<sup>33</sup> The Sages have also commented upon this concept: “*What is the meaning of ‘Ki zeh kol HaAhdom — . . . for this is all: the Man’ (i.e., all is for this: viz., Man [Koheles, 12:13])? — The world in its entirety was created solely to accompany ‘this,’ meaning, to remove the sadness and loneliness he would experience through being by himself.*”

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Thus, it is clear from all of what we have said that the intention behind the creation of everything contained in this world is nothing but the *Man of Perfection* within whom is embodied *Wisdom* and *Deed (Mitzvos)*, as stated above.

When you will contemplate and study the words of the Sages, peace be upon them, on these two concepts, i.e., *Wisdom* and *Deed*, that which they stated explicitly and that which they hinted to through allusions, then you will see how correct they were when they said, “The Holy-One-Blessed-be-He has nothing in His world [of concern to Him] but the four *ahmos* of Halacha.”<sup>34</sup>

We have parted somewhat from the subject we were originally engaged in, but I brought these matters to the attention of the reader because they grace our belief and they inspire one to search for wisdom, and they are not, in my opinion, unimportant.

Now, let us return to our subject.



NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

- 1 Rav Ashi (4113-4187) was the Head of the Academy of Sura (circa 4137). Concerning him it was said, "From the days of Rabbaynu Ha-Kadosh (Rebbe Yehuda HaNasi) until Rav Ashi, Torah scholarship, piety, humbleness and greatness were not all to be found exclusively in one man." Rav Ashi, assisted by all the Sages of his time, worked on the Gemora for the last thirty years of his life. It was finally completed by his disciples and all the Sages seventy-three years after his death (4260).
- 2 "Our Holy Rabbi"—Rebbe Yehuda HaNasi, compiler of the Mishna, who is also referred to plainly as "Rebbe."
- 3 The Aramaic term used in the Gemora referring to a *Teacher* in the Mishna.
- 4 The Rambam is here referring to the type of Drashos which are presented as statements not necessarily associated to Scriptural verses. For a discussion of another type of Drash, in which the Rabbis use verses of the Bible as a kind of poetical way of expressing ideas not really connected with the meaning of the verse, see Part Three of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, latter part of Chapter 43.
- 5 Whereas now the fool will not ridicule and reject the actual truths, but only the literal meanings of the *Drashos*, which are, indeed, absurd. Presenting profound concepts in symbolic forms which are literally absurd was also the practice of the ancient Greek philosophers, who lived at the time of the Tannaim. This is illustrated in the accounts of the debates between the philosophers of Athens and Rabbi Yehoshua ben-Hannania (B'horos 8b, M'harsha *ad loc.*).
- 6 In his *Hakdama L'Perek Haylek* the Rambam describes two groups of people who mistakenly understand all the drashos in their simple meaning. The first he castigates, because while they intend to honor the Torah and its Sages by defending the literal meaning of these drashos, they are actually villifying both. The second group, which he describes as consisting primarily of doctors and astronomers who imagine themselves intellectuals and philosophers, he castigates for constantly mocking the sublime words of the Sages, and calls this group more foolish than the first, being cursed for denigrating the words of Hazahl (the Sages).
- 7 . . . which also includes the sciences of geometry and astronomy.
- 8 . . . whose mind has the potential to develop, however, as well as any unlearned mind (p. 152). The prophetesses reached the highest plane of human intellectual perfection.
- 9 ". . . after the Destruction of the Temple," the statement reads.
- 10 I.e., the "four walls," the one area alone.
- 11 Son and grandson of Noah, who conducted the Academy continuing the transmission of History.
- 12 I.e., before the Revelation of Sinai, there was no G-d-given system of 613 Mitzvos. Before Moses, the prophets persuaded their followers to



- do what is right, but they did not relay direct messages from Hashem (Guide, 2:39).
- 13 By the term "purpose" in this context, the Rambam means the calculated benefit that one object contributes to another (e.g., the rain's purpose is the growth of vegetation). However, pursuing the purpose for everything farther and farther, until one arrives at the conclusion that the purpose for everything is Man, and that *his* purpose is to become perfect by serving Hashem, ultimately leads to the problem of the Purpose for the existence of all these intermediary steps before the last, and what indeed is the Purpose of Man's being perfect (see, however, *Derech Hashem* by Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, 1:2:2). Hence, the answer as to what the final, Ultimate Purpose of the existence of everything as a whole is, ultimately becomes that Hashem's wisdom decreed it to be so (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:13. See also *ibid.* 25).
  - 14 Cf. *Shabbos* 77B; *Yerushalmi Brachos* 64A, "Elijah asked Rabbi Nehorai . . .;" *Medrash Kohelles, Piska V'yissrone ha'aretz b'hall hu* (Hayos, *Ahterress Zvi, Darchay Moshe*, p. 463).
  - 15 Viz., everything on earth, as opposed to the upper spheres and the Permanent M'lahim. See *Guide* 3:13 and *Shloh, Nikreh b'ahserress ma'amaros* (Hayos, *ibid.*, 465).
  - 16 Cf. *Sanhedrin* 37A, 38A; *Kiddushin* 82B.
  - 17 The swallow builds complex nests.
  - 18 The only means we have of grasping the essence of G-d is by understanding His Will—i.e., understanding the 613 Mitzvos.
  - 19 See *Sh'moneh Perakim*, 5.
  - 20 Cf. *Guide*, 1:34:4. These "bodily" pleasures include not only sensual gratifications, but all pleasures, even intellectual, which are not directed for the purpose of serving G-d. If an individual's nature was implanted with a talent for mathematics, for instance, and he spends his time studying it not for the sake of improving his mind to serve Hashem, but because he simply enjoys it, he is no better than one who delights in non-intellectual pursuits for the same reason.
  - 21 Aristotle.
  - 22 Chapter Five of *Ahvus*.
  - 23 Cf. *Tosefos Ryd* on *Kiddushin*. One who possesses "naturally good" character traits, but does not study the Torah for correct behavior, will not perfect himself, and will not always do what is right. It is impossible to properly perform the mitzvos, which perfect a man's character, without a thorough study of all their details. Needless to say, it is impossible, without intense study, to have the proper insight as to the thoughts the mitzvos are designed to nurture.
  - 24 The Rambam here is speaking of the greatest among the greatest, Shimon ben-Yohai, among all the other Tannaim of his era, and is calling only him "the person who is totally wise," classifying all beneath him as those "among the masses," who were not created with the capability of becom-



ing as great as Shimon ben-Yohai. For a description of the magnitude of the greatness in question, see note 31.

- 25 Cf. Avoda Zohra 2A-B, *Rashba* Eruvin 86A; Brachos 17A.
- 26 According to the system of geographic division of the earth used in the Rambam's time, the world was divided into seven zones, the first and seventh considered uninhabited.
- 27 One of the Three Pilgrim Festivals on which Israel was obligated to ascend the Temple Mount (on the condition that they were *tahor*—see Glossary—otherwise it is forbidden to do so) and perform the service in the Sanctuary.
- 28 (Brachos 58a). In order not to misunderstand the sentiment of this statement, it is well to quote the entire passage. The Talmud is discussing the benedictions to be said upon witnessing noteworthy sights. It states that upon seeing great throngs of Jews, one should recite the blessing, "Blessed be The Wise One Who knows the thoughts of each one of these, Who knows that the thoughts of no two are alike, and that the features of no two are identical." It then continues, "When *Ben-Zoma* saw the throngs from atop the Temple Mount, he exclaimed, 'Blessed be The Wise One Who knows the thoughts of each of these, and blessed be He Who created all these to relieve me!' He would say, "So much toil did Adam (who was alone) go through before he found a loaf of bread to eat! He had to plow, and sow, and reap, and bind the sheaves, and thresh and winnow, and refine, and grind, and sift, and knead, and bake—and only then could he eat. Yet I awaken in the morning and find all these things done and my bread prepared before me! And how much toil did Adam go through before he found a garment to wear! He had to shear the wool, and clean the shearings, and separate the fibres, and spin, and weave—and only then did he find a garment to wear! Yet I arise in the morning and find all these things done and garments ready to wear before me!' He would say, "What does a good guest say?—"How much toil did the master of the house go through because of me! So much meat he brought before me, so much wine he brought before me, so much cake he brought before me! And all this toil he went through just because of me!" But what does a wicked guest say?—"What trouble did this master of the house go through? This one loaf of bread I ate; this one chunk of meat I had; one cup of wine I drank. Whatever trouble this man went through he would have gone through anyway because of his wife and children!" ' "

Thus it is seen that Ben-Zoma's statement was made in sincere thankfulness and humbleness before the "master of the house," Hashem; and in the sentiment that he was fortunate to be granted the role of the "guest" in His world, gratefully accepting the relief from the toil granted by the other people accepting *their* roles given to them by G-d, devoting himself to the toil expected of him.

- 29 Viz., fire, water, earth, and air.



- 30 "Do not think that what we have said with regard to the insufficiency of the human mind and its having a limit at which it ceases to grasp things is a statement made in order to conform to the Bible. For this is something that has already been said and truly understood by the philosophers without their being concerned with a particular doctrine or religion" (*Guide* 1:31; *vid.* also *ibid.* 3:13 and contrast with *ibid.* 25).
- 31 The Talmud (Succah 45A) discusses this statement and contrasts it to other statements which tell of a larger number of righteous people in each generation. It then goes on to clarify the context of each of these. This one is speaking of those people who are so advanced as to be worthy of actually perceiving the *total Shechina* (Divine Presence) directly, and who ascend to the *Academy of Above* without any "need for prior permission." (Those who "need prior permission" are 36 in number, and those who perceive the *Shechina*, but not *totally*, are 8,000.)
- 32 Cf. *Guide*, 49. It is a psychological reality that the mere knowledge in one's mind of the presence of other people in the world relieves a feeling of desolation which would otherwise prevail. All the more so do the *tsadikim* need the presence of other people to lead in order to fulfil their purpose. (Cf. Brachos 32A on Exodus 32:7 brought by Rashi *ad loc.*) Of course, *why* Hashem created men with this psychological need, is one of the problems which "are deemed necessarily so at the Creation," to which ultimately we can only say, "So has G-d willed it" (*Guide* 3:13).
- 33 The full verse reads: "I will not banish them (the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites) from before you in one year, lest the land be left desolate and [lest] the wild beasts of the field multiply; little by little will I banish them from before you, until you multiply and inherit the land." Most commentators take the purpose of gradual banishment to be *so that* the beasts do not overwhelm the Israelites through there being no Canaanites, etc., to populate the land with people. The Rambam, however, understands the verse as giving *two* reasons for gradual banishment, the lack of other people being a reason in of itself, besides the ensuing result of a deluge of wild beasts.
- 34 In summary: The Man of Profound Wisdom—i.e., the one who knows the Essential Will of G-d, and thus G-d Himself—is the *Purpose* of the World and all of its inhabitants. The *Mitzvos* are the means by which Man accomplishes his Purpose—activating his dormant intellect—by releasing his mind from the superficial pleasures which subjugate it. Therefore, the four *ahmos* of Torah-Law form the singular concern of Hashem. (Before the system of the 613 *mitzvos* of the Torah, the commandments which had been given were apparently sufficiently inculcated with the powers of the 613 for the men of those greater generations.)